

[Backers, foes of redistricting plan give views at video event](#) (Charlotte Observer – July 8, 2011)

By Jim Morrill

Two Democratic members of Congress, Democratic legislators and other critics Thursday lashed out at Republican-drawn voting districts, saying they violate the Voting Rights Act and ignore natural geographic ties. Others praised GOP lawmakers. "(You've) done a great job of creating legal, fair and competitive districts," former Mecklenburg County GOP Chairman Rob Bryan said during a six-hour public hearing that brought together voters at nine sites across the state. The Republican-controlled General Assembly is scheduled to vote on the maps later this month. Dozens of speakers offered their opinions by video-conference. They included leaders of the NAACP and both parties, local elected officials and average voters. U.S. Reps. G.K. Butterfield of the 1st District and **Mel Watt** of the 12th submitted statements criticizing the plans. Butterfield said the removal of five counties from his Eastern North Carolina district dilutes the voting power of African-Americans in those counties, each of which is specially protected by the Voting Rights Act. "The explanation is a political motive," he wrote, "to disenfranchise minority voters and to reduce their influence in adjoining districts." And state NAACP

President William Barber raised the likelihood of a legal challenge. "We will meet you in court," he told Republican lawmakers. Others criticized the plan for taking the Democratic vote-heavy city of

Asheville out of the 11th District and moving it to the 10th District, which stretches east to the Mecklenburg County line. Judith Ivester of Hickory complained about dividing her town and county, saying the move was "dooming us to political and economic insignificance." While some criticized GOP lawmakers for exacting partisan revenge for past Democratic-drawn gerrymanders, others praised them for holding back. "The vengeful side of me was eager to stick it to the Democrats," said Jeff Hyde of Greensboro. "The Republican leadership in the House and Senate did not fall prey to vengeance." Republicans pointed out that 10 of the state's 13 congressional districts have more Democrats than Republicans. At an earlier news conference, a group of state Senate and House Democrats said the proposals amounted to resegregation of black voters. "They have really just emasculated the black community in this state, and they ought to be ashamed of it," said Rep. Mickey Michaux, a Durham Democrat. "The bottom line is they don't care. All they want is the power." They said 47 percent of the state's black population would be confined to three congressional districts, and about half of the black population would live in 11 of the 50 state Senate districts and 27 of the 120 House districts. Senate Democratic Leader Martin Nesbitt of Asheville and House Minority Leader Joe Hackney of Chapel

Hill said the new GOP districts for Congress and General Assembly make for intentionally lopsided representation after decades of fair play and gains for African-American voters. "Our

districts are fair and legal, and they fully comply with the Voting Rights Act," said Jordan Shaw, a spokesman for House Speaker Thom Tillis of Cornelius. "To date, no groups have come forward with a valid legal argument to the contrary, despite their rhetoric."